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### **Digital Television Conversion**

Beginning February 17, 2009, all full-power broadcast television stations in the United States will stop broadcasting on analog airwaves and begin broadcasting only in digital. The federal government is doing this in order to free up the broadcast spectrum, which is scarce, for public safety services, such as fire and rescue. It will also benefit the broadcast stations by offering better picture and sound quality. This change means that consumers who have analog television sets will need to purchase a digital converter box in order for their televisions to work.

### **Purpose of the Switch**

According to the federal government, broadcasters are transitioning to digital television in large measure to free up bandwidth for public safety officials. In addition, this shift will result in the use of less airwaves to provide a better television viewing experience. Once the transition to DTV is completed, some television channels will be turned over to fire and police departments for emergency communication and others are being auctioned to companies to provide new wireless services.

If you currently watch TV on an analog TV set that is not connected to cable, satellite or other pay TV service, you will need to take action before February 17, 2009. If you own a television with a digital tuner or subscribe to a pay TV service, you will likely continue to receive TV programming as usual after the transition.

### **Needing a Digital Converter Box**

Consumers will need to know whether their television has a "digital tuner." If it does, your TV set will receive digital signals.

There are several ways to determine if your TV has a digital tuner. The easiest way is to consult your owner's manual. If that's not possible, you may be able to look up information about your TV set on the manufacturer's website. Another way to tell if your television is DTV ready is to look for an input connection labeled "digital input" or "ATSC" (which stands for Advanced Television Systems Committee.) Your retailer may be able to tell you as well.

Some additional general guidelines from the federal government that may help:

- TV sets purchased before 1998 probably do not have a digital tuner.
- Big-screen, projection TV sets purchased between 1998 and 2004 may have a built-in digital tuner inside. However, those are generally limited to those 42 inches in diameter or larger.

Starting in 2004, many of the TV sets sold at popular electronics stores feature digital tuners. However, if your television set is labeled as a “Digital Monitor” or “HDTV Monitor,” or as “Digital Ready” or “HDTV Ready,” this does not mean it actually contains a digital tuner. You will likely need a separate set-top box, available at the same electronic stores as digital-to-analog converter boxes, which contains a digital tuner in order to view over-the-air digital programming.

TVs connected to cable, satellite or other pay TV service will not require a TV converter box from this program. Cable and satellite subscribers should check with their providers to see whether there are or will be any cable- or satellite-specific changes to their pay service.

### **Obtaining and Connecting a Converter Box**

If you have determined that your TV does not have a digital tuner, you will need to have a converter box by February 17, 2009, in order for your TV to continue to work. You can purchase a converter box at most stores that sell electronics, such as Best Buy, RadioShack and Target. Since most stations are already transmitting digital broadcasts, consumers with older model televisions using an antenna to receive their free channels can connect the converter box and begin to enjoy the benefits of digital TV now. The boxes are designed for consumers to connect them, so you should not need to hire someone to install the converter box.

### **Costs and Acceptable Models**

Converter boxes range in price from \$40 to \$70. Federal officials set up a coupon program through which coupons valued at \$40 are available to consumers from the federal government through March 31, 2009. However, according to the [FTC](#), the TV Converter Box Coupon Program has reached its funding ceiling. However, coupon requests from eligible households will be filled on a first-come-first-served basis as funds become available from expiring coupons. You will not receive coupons until funds become available. If you would like to apply for a coupon today and are eligible, you will be placed on a waiting list. For more information, log onto [www.dtv2009.gov](http://www.dtv2009.gov) or call 1-888-DTV-2009.

Only specific converter boxes meet federal performance and technical standards. Before purchasing a converter box, consumers should check the list of acceptable models on the [National Telecommunications and Information Administration \(NITA's\)](#) website, or contact the [Federal Communications Commission](#) at 1-888-CALL-FCC. Converter boxes do not need to be compatible with models of television. As with all consumer purchases, it is wise to save your receipt.

### **Out with the Old, In with the New**

You do NOT need to get rid of your electronic equipment unless you want to. Once you have the converter box, your equipment should work properly. If you choose to discard your analog TV set, check with your local electronics store about their recycling program. Additionally, the federal government recommends researching recycling programs to take your old electronic equipment. Visit the myGreenElectronics website ([www.mygreenelectronics.org](http://www.mygreenelectronics.org)) to learn about disposal options and locate recycling programs near you.

If you are purchasing a TV today, or if you purchased one since March 1, 2007, all television reception devices (including TVs, VCRs, and DVRs) imported into the U.S. or shipped in interstate commerce must contain a digital tuner under federal law. Retailers may continue to sell analog-only devices from existing inventory but they must prominently display a notice on or near the equipment that lets the consumer know it has an analog only broadcast tuner. If you have questions about a purchase, call 1-888-CALL-FCC.

**More Information**

For additional information on the digital switch, view the FCC's informational website, [www.dtv.gov](http://www.dtv.gov), or call 1-888-CALL-FCC. The FCC provides information on their website in both English and Spanish. They also provide materials for an Outreach Toolkit, which can be used by government agencies, community organizations, and others, to conduct DTV Transition Awareness Programs. These materials are not copyrighted, and, therefore, no reprint permission is required.